**Functions of Nouns**  
A Brief Introduction for Students learning German

### Examples of Functions

(Follow the word *dog* in these examples and see how the *dog* operates differently in each example.)

1. The dog chased the squirrel out of our yard.  
   *performer, actor, do-er, agent = subject*

2. The neighbor girls petted the dog all afternoon.  
   *acted on, victim, do-ee, patient = direct object*

3. The boys tossed a cookie to the dog.  
   *recipient, getter of a gift, = beneficiary / indirect object*

4. (The boys tossed the dog a cookie. - alternate of no. 3)  
   *(recipient, getter of a gift= beneficiary / indirect object)*

5. Jody painted the dog's hut last week.  
   *owner, possessor of something = possessor*

6. Barb shook some flea powder over the dog.  
   *location, destination = locative / destinate*

7. That ball of fur is really the dog.  
   *re-names, equal to, same as = predicate nominal*

8. Suzette walked to the park with the dog.  
   *together with, companionship = accompaniment*

### Cases associated with Noun Functions in German

There are more functions of nouns than there are cases in German to represent those functions. Therefore, each case can represent multiple functions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>function</th>
<th>associated case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>subject</td>
<td>nominative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direct object</td>
<td>accusative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beneficiary</td>
<td>dative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>predicate noun</td>
<td>nominative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>possessive</td>
<td>genitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>locative</td>
<td>dative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accompaniment</td>
<td>dative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>target</td>
<td>accusative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Definitions:

- **function**: how nouns and pronouns operate in a sentence - the manner in which they perform in the context of a sentence (performer, victim, recipient, etc.)

- **noun**: a word that names something – can take words such as *the or this* – are capitalized in German – can take description using adjectives (*the red book*) – nouns must take function within a sentence

- **pronoun**: a short word that replaces a noun along with all the other words associated with that noun – *it* replaces the following three words: *the red book*

- **nominal**: generic term for nouns and pronouns

- **verb**: a word that shows action, process or state of being – typically takes endings and always agrees grammatically with the subject

- **agent**: the element in a sentence that performs the action indicated by the verb

- **subject**: the grammatical element in a sentence to which the verb agrees – the subject is always in the nominative case – in active-voice sentences, the subject and agent are the same

- **patient**: an element in a sentence that is acted on - the agent acts on the patient via the verb

- **direct object**: an element in a sentence that is acted on by the subject – the direct object is nearly always in the accusative case – in active-voice sentences, the direct object and patient are the same

- **beneficiary**: a recipient, typically a person – receives the direct object from the subject through the action of the verb

- **indirect object**: another name for beneficiary

- **predicate nominal**: an element in a sentence that re-names the subject – an additional word in the sentence that is equal to or becomes the subject

- **oblique object**: any nominal element that is not the subject, neither direct nor indirect object, not a predicate noun – the object of a preposition is an oblique object